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A The congressional committees probing the Iran-Contra scandal want to verify that former CIA Director William Casey is too sick to talk to investigators, leaders of the Senate panel said Tuesday.

The committees are working on the assumption Casey will not be able to testify when hearings into the scandal start on May 5, and have no indication that his medical condition is anything but grave, sources said.

Casey resigned as CIA director in February two months after surgery for brain cancer.

Sen. Warren Rudman, R-N.H., vice chairman of the select committee, said it is important to verify his condition since many people believe he could provide important testimony on the sale of U.S. arms to Iran and efforts to aid the Nicaraguan Contra rebels.

"The record should be historically correct," Rudman said. "The committee's taken no official action but I expect at some point there'll be a discreet inquiry made in some way.

"I don't think anybody has any doubt (that Casey is seriously ill) but I think ... since Casey potentially is such an important witness there ought to be some corroboration," he said.

A spokesman for independent counsel Lawrence Walsh said he would not comment on his investigation or how it related to Casey.

The Senate panel Tuesday voted to grant immunity to Rear Adm. John Poindexter, a move that would compel the former national security adviser to testify about his and President Reagan's role in the scandal.

The vote was taken by polling members of the committee without a formal meeting. The House panel planned to take a similar vote Wednesday.

Poindexter, who quit as Reagan's national security adviser when the diversion of arms sales profits to the Nicaraguan Contra rebels was revealed Nov. 25, is considered a key witness who will be asked what he told Reagan about the two covert operations.

Rudman also said the committees have pretty much nailed down the complex trail of money involved in the affair.

"The committees ... have an excellent idea of where the majority of the money went, how it was handled, and we'll have it certainly as complete as you can ever get anything like that by the time the hearings start," Rudman said.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, a panel member, said people would be "surprised about the money trail -- where it came from and where it went."

Hatch said, "You'll be surprised by the size" but he wouldn't say whether it was more or less than \$10 million to \$30 million Attorney General Edwin Meese originally said was diverted to the Contras.

In discussing the Casey matter, Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, chairman of the select committee, said he was "sensitive" to Casey's privacy but said the committee had a "responsibility" to verify his medical condition.

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"There is no question that Mr. Casey has much to tell the nation either through this committee or otherwise," Inouye said. "If he is unable to participate, then the record should so indicate.

"At the present time, the only thing we have on the record (about Casey's condition) are newspaper articles," he said.

He said the verification would be done by an "expert," meaning a doctor, but that it would not go forward if Casey or his family object.

Reports on the Iran-Contra affair by the Senate Intelligence Committee and the presidentially appointed Tower Commission said Casey, 74, learned of a possible funds diversion to the Contras about a month before the story became public last Nov. 25.

"(Casey) did not move promptly to raise the matter with the president. Yet his responsibility to do so was clear," the Tower Commission said. It also criticized Casey for allowing the National Security Council, not the CIA, to have "operational responsibility" for the arms-sale initiative.

In addition, it was reported last month that congressional investigators had clear indications Casey masterminded the administration's efforts to help the Contras get military supplies and had become a central focus of the panels' investigations.

Casey had testified before three congressional committees probing the Iran-Contra scandal -- and was scheduled for additional appearances -- when he suffered a seizure last December at his CIA office.

Three days later he underwent brain cancer surgery and was hospitalized until mid-February. Casey, who resigned as CIA director on Feb. 2, returned to the hospital for more treatment in mid-March. A month after the operation he was reported to have difficulty speaking and walking. Heavy secrecy has surrounded his condition since that report, but there is no indication he has improved.

Acting CIA Director Robert Gates recently told a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee that Casey is doing "as well as could be expected," according to a congressional source.

In related matters:

-The congressional committees expect to receive from the White House excerpts from President Reagan's diaries related to the affair shortly, possibly by the end of the week, a Senate source said.

-The committees expect to receive from the Israeli government chronologies of Israeli contacts in the affair by the time hearings start in two weeks, the source said.